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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANILA 002839

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TAGS: [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PTER](#) [RP](#)  
SUBJECT: ABU SAYYAF TERRORISTS KILLED ON BASILAN

REF: A. MANILA 2733

[1](#)B. MANILA 2732  
[1](#)C. MANILA 2714  
[1](#)D. MANILA 2688  
[1](#)E. MANILA 2629  
[1](#)F. MANILA 2575  
[1](#)G. MANILA 2503  
[1](#)H. MANILA 2474  
[1](#)I. MANILA 2428  
[1](#)J. MANILA 2369  
[1](#)K. MANILA 2358  
[1](#)L. MANILA 2344

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Paul W. Jones, for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: As part of continuing operations to track down terrorists in Mindanao, Philippine troops attacked and killed a number of Abu Sayyaf members on Basilan August 18, including two significant local commanders suspected of involvement in the killing of U.S. citizens in 2001-2. Philippine forces suffered sizable casualties, raising the armed forces' death toll over the past two months to 56. Meanwhile, scheduled changes to the Philippine military's leadership are expected over the next week, but neither the personnel changes nor the additional casualties should alter the government's strategy of aggressively pursuing terrorists while preserving the peace process with the larger Muslim insurgent groups. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) The Philippine military said its troops killed as many as 42 insurgents in a surprise early morning attack August 18 on Abu Sayyaf members in the village of Unkaya Pukan, Basilan. A Philippine military spokesman said the attack was undertaken with cooperation from local government and the Muslim insurgent Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). While actual casualty figures are difficult to verify, it is clear that the deaths of the two Abu Sayyaf "sub-leaders" -- relatives Furugi and Umair Indama -- are a major setback for the leadership of the terrorist organization's Basilan faction. Furugi is suspected of involvement in several terrorist attacks, including an October 2002 bombing that killed a U.S. serviceman and the 2001 beheading of U.S. citizen Guillermo Sobero. Umair is believed to have played a direct role in last month's beheading of 10 Marines killed by MILF guerrillas.

[1](#)3. (C) The Philippine military reported 15 troops dead and seven wounded. The co-pilot of an MG-520 attack helicopter providing air support to the operation also died in a crash reportedly caused by mechanical failure. As a result of this crash, the Philippine Air Force grounded its fleet of 17 MG-520s until the cause of the incident can be investigated.

[1](#)4. (C) In a separate action August 19, Philippine special operations forces conducted a surprise nighttime raid on a

key safehouse of the Abu Sayyaf terrorists on Jolo island, capturing ten adults and a variety of weapons. Philippine officials are currently exploiting this success.

¶5. (U) Separately, the armed forces are undertaking several important leadership changes in the coming weeks, including a new Army chief of staff and the head of forces in Western Mindanao. The new Army chief of staff will be Lieutenant General (LTG) Alexander Yano, who is well known and highly regarded by U.S. military officers; he will replace LTG Romeo Tolentino on August 24. In September, Western Mindanao Command chief LTG Eugenio Cedo will retire, but his replacement has not yet been announced. The changes are required because both officers reached the mandatory retirement age of 56.

¶6. (C) Comment: While the military operations on Basilan and Jolo are a substantial setback for the Abu Sayyaf, the loss of more Philippine troops has cast a pall over continuing success in tracking terrorists. The growing death toll -- including for the armed forces -- has led to some additional calls from Congressional, church and local Mindanao officials for the government to end its military offensive, but we do not expect that or upcoming personnel changes will substantially affect the government's determination to fight the Abu Sayyaf terrorists.

JONES